



## COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO NEWS RELEASE

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### **OUR BEST SHOT: 20 YEARS OF FIGHTING DISEASE** ***San Diego Immunization Coalition Raises Immunization Rates, Prevents Illness***

A severe measles outbreak two decades ago led to the creation of a countywide coalition that has increased the number of fully immunized infants and children in San Diego, resulting in fewer deaths from vaccine-preventable diseases.

The San Diego County Immunization Coalition (SDIC) was born as a result of the outbreak, which infected nearly 1,200 people and resulted in three infant deaths between 1989 and 1991.

SDIC has now grown to include about 150 partner individuals and organizations working together to develop strategies to raise immunization rates for all San Diego County residents.

"The Coalition is one of the oldest immunization coalitions in the nation and a perfect example of the collaboration that is needed to protect the health of county residents," said Chairman Bill Horn, County Board of Supervisors, at a news conference before SDIC's 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration. "I commend the organizations and individuals in the Coalition for their commitment to prevent disease and improve the health of the community."

In 1991, only 60 percent of infants and children were fully immunized with the recommended vaccines for diphtheria, tetanus, pertussis, polio, measles, mumps, and rubella. By 2009, the rate had jumped to 86 percent.

Vaccines are among the most successful and cost-effective public health tools available for preventing disease and death. Vaccines not only help protect vaccinated individuals, but they also protect the entire community by preventing and reducing the spread of infectious diseases.

"Advances in medical science and the development of new vaccines have improved protection against disease for children and adults," said Nick Macchione, Director of the County's Health and Human Services Agency, which is spearheading the County's Live Well, San Diego! initiative, a 10 year plan to improve the health and wellbeing of area residents. "This has resulted in fewer children getting sick and, more importantly, fewer children dying," added Macchione.

Safe and effective vaccines have eliminated or made rare diseases such as polio and diphtheria that once disabled or killed thousands of children in the United States. Vaccines have been so successful in prevention some parents are unaware that their children are still at risk for serious and life-threatening diseases. Some parents choose to not vaccinate their children out of concern that vaccines may not be safe.

"Parents can rest assured that the vaccines their children are getting are safe and effective," said Wilma Wooten, M.D., M.P.H., County Public Health Officer. "Vaccines are tested before being approved for public use and monitored carefully by doctors, researchers, and public health officials after immunizations begin."

April 23-30 is National Infant Immunization Week and Vaccination Week in the Americas, annual observances which highlight the importance of protecting infants and children from vaccine-preventable diseases.

For more information about the Coalition, vaccinations and preventable infectious diseases, please call the HHS Immunization Branch at (866) 358-2966, or visit the web site at [www.sdiz.org](http://www.sdiz.org).

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